

Decolonisation Is Not Such a Scary Thing

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In these days of ant-DEI activism, it is important to talk about a fundamental aspect of improving European-African relations: decolonisation. The term often evokes unease,. It has done so long before the rise of the populist right. Many perceive it as threatening established practices, and implying a radical dismantling of traditional frameworks. However, a closer examination reveals that decolonisation does not have to be either frightening or destructive. Instead, it represents a valuable opportunity for mutual learning, deeper understanding, and more effective collaboration.

To appreciate why decolonisation need not provoke anxiety, consider the case of social entrepreneurship, the topic of my PhD research. Academic theories of social entrepreneurship, largely developed in Europe and the United States, typically emphasise three core elements: innovation, profitability, and the presence of a clear social mission. Such frameworks have undoubtedly generated significant insights and positive impact within their original contexts. Yet, when these theories are exported wholesale to African contexts, important realities are frequently overlooked. Africa's diverse countries and communities operate under vastly different socio-economic conditions, and what constitutes entrepreneurship or innovation can vary dramatically from one location to another.

Decolonisation of theory does not imply abandoning Western knowledge; rather, it invites a critical and constructive dialogue between European and African scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. It recognises that theories originating in Western contexts should be adapted, revised, or expanded when applied elsewhere. This adaptation process enriches the original concepts, adding depth and relevance rather than weakening them. It allows social entrepreneurs in Africa to define their activities authentically - validating strategies shaped by local economic constraints, funding realities, and cultural norms.

So, far from undermining Europe's position, embracing a decolonised approach offers tangible benefits to European actors. It encourages European institutions and researchers to develop more context-sensitive and applicable models, enhancing their relevance globally. European organisations that embrace diverse theoretical perspectives can cultivate stronger partnerships in Africa, fostering trust and credibility. By genuinely engaging with and understanding the unique circumstances in African countries, European stakeholders can

more effectively collaborate on shared challenges such as poverty alleviation, healthcare, climate resilience, and inclusive economic development.

Decolonisation is not about hostility. It is about dialogue, mutual respect, and humility in recognising the limits of one's own perspective. For instance, in South Africa or Ghana, a social enterprise's reliance on a hybrid model - combining earned revenue with grants or donations - is not a failure of entrepreneurship but an intelligent adaptation to complex economic environments. Recognising such adaptations as valid and valuable contributes positively to mutual learning between European and African actors. There is a great opportunity for decolonisation to unlock value, ideas and business models from Africa and reinvent them for a European context.

Ultimately, Europe and Africa alike stand to benefit from decolonising the frameworks that guide their interactions. Moving away from rigid, externally imposed definitions towards more inclusive, adaptable, and genuinely collaborative approaches will not weaken partnerships. Instead, it will strengthen them, creating resilient relationships grounded in mutual respect and deeper, shared understanding. Decolonisation, in short, is not something to fear—it is something to embrace.